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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000194

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2029  
TAGS: [CU](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [UN](#)  
SUBJECT: MAKING THE MOST OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR NOWAK'S  
VISIT TO CUBA

Classified By: COM Jonathan Farrar for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d0)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Special Rapporteur for Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Manfred Nowak, is expected to visit Cuba sometime in 2009. USINT urges that he be approached before the trip with offers of information we have on prisoners and prisons in Cuba. ACTION REQUEST PARA 5. End Summary.

¶1. (C) One outcome of the February 4, Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Cuba before the UN Human Rights Council was the announcement that UN Special Rapporteur for Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Manfred Nowak, will visit Cuba sometime later in 2009. Some press reports have said Nowak will arrive in Cuba in October, but we have no indication that any date has been established.

¶2. (C) The EU had included Cuba's permitting visits by special rapporteurs among the benchmarks for reviewing the status of the EU Common Position. The GOC appears willing to allow such visits, but as with all contacts with the outside world, it wants to be sure that the visits are carried out strictly on its own terms. Special Rapporteur on Food and Human Rights Jean Zeigler visited in late 2007, the first visit of a Special Rapporteur to Cuba in more than 20 years. His statements praising Cuba's system of distributing food delivered at a carefully scripted press conference got wide press play within Cuba (and met with wide ridicule among members of Cuban civil society). However, Zeigler's more detailed formal report containing several useful observations and recommendations regarding some of the weakpoints in Cuba's food supply network, unfortunately went unreported in the press.

¶3. (C) Several political prisoners and/or family members of prisoners have reported to us that in the past few weeks there has been significant activity in almost all prisons to clean, paint, replace furniture, etc. Conscious of the usual GOC moQs operandi, we suspect that it is working hard to put on a good face for a Nowak visit. However, it is unlikely that it can transform the entire system of jails and penitentiaries. Rather, we believe the GOC will attempt at all costs to manage Nowak's visit so that he sees only things that it wants him to see.

¶4. (C) In that vein, we read with interest an EFE report from Montevideo about Nowak's March 21-27 visit to Uruguay and believe that the activity described in the press report would be an excellent plan of action for his visit to Cuba. According to the press report, Nowak made unannounced visits to psychiatric hospitals and prisons of his choosing, met with local human rights organizations, and with family members of prisoners. All of these would be great options in Cuba. To those we would add a review of the treatment of common criminals. Prisoners of conscience tend to get most

of the attention in Cuba, and the GOC insists they are all US-paid spies and therefore common criminals. However, from the reporting we have gotten from a variety of sources, treatment of ordinary prisoners is even worse than treatment of prisoners of conscience.

¶5. (C) ACTION REQUEST: USINT suggests that IO and DRL approach Nowak before his trip to Cuba and that information available publicly in our human rights report regarding the state of the prison system and treatment of prisoners be passed to him. We also believe that the access he was able to achieve in Uruguay should serve as a benchmark for access in Cuba. Anything less should, in itself, be justification for public comment on his part.  
FARRAR